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THE JUST BALANCE.

AMONG the best results that Life, or any course of mental training, yields we may reckon the power "of holding things in their proportion," of dismissing quickly from our minds things trivial and passing, or, on the other hand, of giving careful consideration and study to some subject in order that we may realize its essential worth and meaning.

Some people have by nature minds not easily moved in any direction, and we call them "placid." Placidity is not, perhaps, one of the more fashionable complaints of the day, nor does its comparative rarity make it particularly valuable in our eyes. There is something so unspeakably dull about the person who never gets ruffled, never sees sufficient reason to join hotly in any of the wild rejoicings to which we have lately grown accustomed, nor ever descends to such depths of wretchedness as others reach.

There is, however, the acquired mental attitude which has outwardly some resemblance to placidity, but does, in fact, spring from an entirely different source. The one is rather like the steady-going punt, which can scarcely be upset, the other like the highly-evolutionized "eight," kept in working position by the nicest adjustment of very lively forces.

Placidity generally implies a kind of mental sluggishness, whereas a well-balanced mind is alert and quickly set working, yielding us increase of power, not more by directing our emotions and mental forces than by storing them till needed.

We are each obliged to move in an appointed circle—our groove, as we say—and one groove at a time, and generally for a long time, is as much as most of us can manage. Week in, week out, we do much the same work and see chiefly the same people; the household in which we live becomes the principal corner of the whole earth to us, and, unconsciously it may be, we individually form the centre of it, and look at all passing events first as they affect ourselves.

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Theoretically we all abhor any indulgence in self-pity, but practically it is not always so easy to keep clear of this. The reflection that our worst troubles are slight compared to what some have to bear has a certain power of shaming us out of indulging unduly grief and sadness. Little personal worries and disappointments—a new bicycle badly damaged, or a long looked-for visit indefinitely postponed—may be made to appear comparatively insignificant if we can each say to ourselves: "What shall I think of this ten, or even two, years hence?"

Or again, a lesson goes off badly, and the teacher feels she has wasted time, worried her pupils, and presented ideas in some wrong fashion. Will it not be some consolation to reflect that the same thing was probably done many times to her in her childhood, and yet her "keenness" still survives? Just as children have commonly a power of rapid recovery from illness, so do they seem to have the power of withstanding the harm we often do them through ignorance or over-zeal. This recuperative power of theirs seems to trample on many cherished theories concerning their upbringing: witness the fine characters and fine physiques reared under "old"—dare we say "wrong"?—systems of education.

It is surely entirely right that, as teachers and parents, we should recognise our immense responsibilities, but are we not somewhat apt to think of ourselves as one of the very chief channels through which life for mind and soul is to be imparted to the children we have in charge; whereas, for all we know, there may be far more inward influences at work upon them, and we ourselves but very minor instruments in their education. We need not therefore be dismayed if, after months of patient work, we seem to have done nothing. Though it may appear that we personally are not to be the means of much or little improvement in a child, we shall scarcely therefore imagine that that improvement will not some day be an accomplished fact.

Then, again, there are events which do not touch us personally at all, and yet necessarily claim our attention. How are we to look with an equal mind upon war, plague, famine, and destitution of any kind? Plainly, the first thing is to help where we can, and, that done, we are no longer

responsible, except for our own mental attitude towards these facts. Religion, science, social life are all in the hands, as it were, of Evolution—the law by which all our conditions of life, all our mental and moral conceptions, are carried surely forward to higher states of development; not in spite of the sin and misery in which the world is, but through their means. Viewed thus, even the black clouds of disease, squalor, and iniquity, which from one point of view are so appalling, are found to have a less dark side of which it will be well for us never to lose sight.

Lest anything here written should seem to suggest taking our life and work lightly, may we add that it is not so meant. We have all come to regard our special work of helping to educate as fitly done only when we are putting forth our best powers, and this paper has been written simply from a wish to help those of us who are keenly alive to their own limitations and the beauty and unreachableness of their ideal.

B. E. F.